IN THE CLAIMS

The following claims are presented for examination.

1. (Original) A method for transmitting wideband speech signals over a narrowband communication system, comprising:

generating a narrowband digital signal at a base station from a plurality of data packets received from a remote station, wherein the plurality of data packets carry a wideband speech signal;

puncturing the narrowband digital signal with the plurality of data packets;

transmitting the punctured narrowband digital signal over the narrowband communication system to a second base station;

separating the narrowband digital signal from the plurality of data packets at the second base station; and

forwarding only the plurality of data packets to a second remote station.

2. (Original) The method of Claim 1, wherein the puncturing of the narrowband digital signal occurs in the least significant bits of the narrowband digital signal.

3. (Original) The method of Claim 1, further comprising disabling a plurality of in-path equipment at the first base station and the second base station.

4. (Original) The method of Claim 3, wherein the plurality of in-path equipment comprise echo cancellers.

5. (Original) The method of Claim 3, wherein the plurality of in-path equipment comprise a decoding portion of a vocoder.

6. (Original) The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of negotiating for tandem-free operations between the first base station and the second base station before the step of puncturing.

7. (Original) The method of Claim 1, wherein the narrowband digital signal is a pulse code modulated (PCM) signal.

8. (Cancelled)

9. (Cancelled)

10. (Cancelled)

11. (Cancelled)

12. (Cancelled)

13. (Cancelled)

14. (Original) An apparatus for transmitting wideband speech signals over a narrowband communication system, comprising:

means for generating a narrowband digital signal at a base station from a plurality of data packets received from a remote station, wherein the plurality of data packets carry a wideband speech signal;

means for puncturing the narrowband digital signal with the plurality of data packets;

means for transmitting the punctured narrowband digital signal over the narrowband communication system to a second base station;

means for separating the narrowband digital signal from the plurality of data packets at the second base station; and

means for forwarding the plurality of data packets to a second remote station.

15. (Cancelled)

16. (Cancelled)